PARTH B.

Watcher

The Cost of Coherence

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Preface

> Watcher was written in a time when everything around me—and within me—was coming undone. I was tired of living alone in my head, surrounded by noise that mistook opinion for understanding. These pages are not conclusions but glimpses through my lens, shaped by years of questioning and quiet observation. They are fragments of a lifelong attempt to see clearly, to make sense of what moves beneath thought, belief, and suffering. What follows is not an answer, but a mirror.

Fiction lets the truth walk into the room without everyone turning away.
It dresses what is unbearable in a shape the mind can hold.

THE SLIGHT DEFECT

Tilted Floor

He was born with a slight defect. It was not visible. Not clinical. A tilt in the floor under everything. He learned to stand. The floor didn't.

People said precocious, quiet, old soul. He learned the alphabet of compliments that mean: please don't change the furniture.

Other kids played. He stood nearby and timed the laughter. Three seconds if someone starts it. Two if the funny person does. One if the teacher watches.

He took apart a clock and put it back with the tick louder. He liked it that way. Noise that admits itself.

He asked his mother why adults ask for honesty and then frown. She said, because honesty hurts. He said, then stop asking. She folded a towel for the fourth time. It was already square.

The therapist had soft lamps and plants that looked like fake sincerity. "How do you feel about friends?" He said, like I'm renting a costume I can't return. She nodded like a metronome. "Let's talk about coping." He never went back. Not offended. Just done.

At school a boy cheated. The room shrugged. He was late once and got a check on the board. He asked, why is being late worse than being false. The teacher said, because late stops the class. He said, false stops reality. The class laughed. He went to silent lunch. The food made no sound.

He watched a girl tell her friend "love you" without looking up. The word bounced off her phone and died under the table.

He felt too much and exactly. A cricket died on the windowsill and he thought about its last confused movement until morning. The bully shoved a smaller boy and he felt both throats. The small boy's heat. The bully's father's shadow on a Sunday wall. Empathy didn't help. It made knives dull, not gone.

He wanted sex before he knew the word. Body first, sentence later. He knew what it was for: forgetting separateness. It worked and didn't. He kissed a girl behind a metal door and counted her heartbeat in her neck, then hated that he counted it. Later she texted a smile and he stared at the dots typing, typing, deleting. He wanted a room where the body wasn't pretending to be language. He wanted both. It made him hungry and unserved.

He judged. He knew he judged. He thought judgment is just

choosing what to keep. Without choosing you keep everything, which is the same as nothing. He held that and also held the other thing: on the scale that melts names, everything is equal ash. Both were true and useless in the hallway between third and fourth period.

His father watched a show where a man hurt a woman. "Monster," his father said. He nodded. Also, he saw the boy the man used to be and the room that pressed him into a shape. Not excuse. Blueprint. His chest knew the woman first. His head knew the mold after. The two truths stepped on each other and kept walking.

He learned to mirror. People liked him for a week. Then someone said he felt like being watched by a person not quite human. He thought: correct. He kept the thought.

He likes materials. Glass that stays cold. Metal that admits its temperature. The kitchen sink makes an honest sound. He pressed his forehead to the window in winter and liked the sting. Reality that doesn't apologize feels like a hand.

He tried prayer without god. He held his breath until the edge and asked the room to say anything back. The room hummed like a refrigerator. A reliable machine. He was grateful for refrigerators.

He wrote sentences the way some people stack coins. He put one line under only the ones that didn't lie. One line only. Rules organize hunger.

Lunch. A teacher says, “Consent is simple.” He thinks, the simple part is the poster. The complicated part is the rent. He says nothing. He can see the yes that is really a no that is really a please don’t leave me alone in the cold again. He chews and swallows because he must.

He saw a man at the bus stop shake his hands like they were dirty with invisible work. The man said to the air, “She makes me do it.” Streetlight buzzing, bus late, everyone looking away like a chore. He wanted to lift the whole street into a different angle. He put his hands in his pockets instead and counted the holes in the bench. There were eight.

He kept failing at being normal and succeeding at being unbroken. It looked the same from outside.

He learned a sentence from a documentary. Harmony is more important than justice. The sentence sat under the tongue like a splinter he did not want to remove. He noticed it everywhere. The group smiles at the liar if the liar keeps the music going. They punish the drum that hits off beat even if the beat is true.

He stopped fighting the sentence. He started measuring it. When did harmony save, when did it rot. He made a column in a notebook. Save on the left. Rot on the right. The right side filled faster.

A small thing: his mother crying at a movie where the man says sorry too late. He paused it. “He meant it at the end,” she said. He said, he meant it when it hurt him. She said, you’re cruel. He thought, I’m accurate. He pressed play. The movie forgave

the man. The couch forgave the room.

He thinks in corridors. Two doors open at once. He won't shut one just to make the hallway quiet. People hate that. They want a room. He wants the building.

He noticed how kindness can be a leash. "Be yourself" means "be the version we can carry without breaking our backs." He tried being himself and needed fewer people. It was efficient.

He is hypersexual and bored by sex. Wants and watches at the same time. Body says now. Mind says what is this for. Both voices are his, neither loud enough to win. He touches and stops. He apologizes and does not explain. There is not a sentence for "I need the floor to stop tilting before I can stand inside you."

He doesn't believe in better, only in accurate. Better changes with weather. Accurate stays when the power goes out.

He tried silence. It amplified the fan. He tried noise. It amplified the silence behind it. He tried friends. They asked him to choose a side in their breakups, their beliefs, their jokes. He couldn't. He could see the wound in both and the part of the wound that wore teeth. He held his tongue and carried both home like wet coats.

He wrote: No one chooses to be bad. They choose the next step in a hallway that was already built. Build different hallways. The sentence looked like a poster. He hated it. He kept it.

He practiced kindness as subtraction. Remove one unneeded

sentence from a room and see if it breathes. It worked sometimes. Other times the room wanted the sentence back because it covered a draft.

He loved his parents in the slow way you love a roof. It leaks, you put a bowl down, you move the bed, you say it's fine. He watched them choose harmony over truth and survive. He watched truth sit in a chair by the door with its coat on.

He discovered a small rule: if telling the truth will make a person more alone than they can carry, wait. If waiting makes you lie to yourself, leave. He left often by staying quiet.

He does not like gods. He respects thermodynamics. Things cool if left alone. He is left alone often. He wears a jacket.

He keeps a single photo of himself as a child on a swing. His hands are white with grip. The chain bites. He's smiling like it hurts. Joy that requires that much holding on is training for later.

He has a defect in the wiring where other people have fog. He sees edges too sharp and can't sand them down without bleeding. He hates that this sentence makes him sound superior. He is not superior. He is crowded.

He will not choose a team he can see through. He will also not pretend both teams are the same. He will say: you are both right and both ruining it. He will be asked to leave.

He wants coherence more than approval, food, sex, weather

relief. Coherence is the trap. He knows. He reaches for it anyway, like a man sticking his hand into the same drawer that bites him because the knife belongs there.

At night, the fan turns, the house clicks, the neighbor coughs. Honest sounds. He lists them until sleep. Tick, click, cough, breath. He forgives the day for tilting. He forgives himself for standing funny.

He won't stop looking. He won't stop loving what he cannot fix. He won't be cured. He will be precise.

He sleeps. The tilt stays. Morning will be there. The floor, same. He won't fix it. He will walk anyway.

Masks Start Early

Morning again. Same floor. Same tilt.

He learned the mask by accident. You copy the angle, you're invited. You keep it too long, you get lost. He preferred lost to invited, most days.

Hallway. Teeth smiles. Eyes clocked out. He nodded the way nods are supposed to sound. People relaxed. He wrote that down. Relax = believed.

Mouths say "we should hang." Calendars never move. He watched the sentence evaporate mid-air like hot water in

winter.

He kept the ledger open in his pocket. Save. Rot. He added small entries with a dull pencil. He liked when the point broke. It told the truth about pressure.

Health class again. The poster did its job. CONSENT IS SIMPLE. ASK. LISTEN. RESPECT. He believed it and didn't. The teacher said, "No means no." He thought about the trained yes, the winter yes, the hungry yes. He thought about the boy who can't read a room because the room's never read him. He said nothing. He ate an apple too fast and his gums bled. That felt closer to education.

A friend asked him to take a side in a break-up. "She's manipulative." Another said, "He's cold." Both true, wrong shape. He said, "You are both scared." They said, "Pick." He said, "No." He lost both. The day got simpler and heavier.

He practiced subtraction in conversation. Remove one sentence, the room breathes. Remove two, the room thinks you're cruel. He stopped at one.

He learned how love is performed in groups: public affection, private accounting. He watched a couple rehearse kindness like lines. The pauses had meaning, not the words. He felt bad for the pauses. They do the heavy lifting.

Faces kept talking louder than voices. Eyes telling the truth, mouth sweeping it under the rug. He sketched the gap on a receipt, wrote "tender lie" under it, then crossed it out. He

didn't like naming things before they finished being alive.

At lunch, a teacher smiled like a mask that fit correctly. "You're thoughtful," she said. He said, thank you. He wanted to ask, does my thinking help or just keep me out of your way. He didn't.

He noticed hands. How people hold cups when they want to seem calm. Paper cups crease at the same spot. The coffee forgives.

Walking home, daycare again. A child looked at him without category. Full bandwidth. The same cold-water feeling from last time. He looked away because that kind of seeing is rare and he didn't want to scare it. He thought: this is what real attention feels like. It hurts because it doesn't aim.

He opened his notebook on the curb. Underline once: Attention that doesn't aim is the only kind that doesn't lie.

He tried being easy for a day. It felt like wearing shoes that smile while they bruise you. He took them off at night. His feet were honest again.

Therapist two tried jokes. "You're young to be this serious." He said, serious is just listening without music. She smiled and wrote that down. He wanted his sentence back.

He became a corridor on purpose. People walked through him to shout at whoever wasn't there. He let them. He dusted after. He didn't charge rent.

He made a smaller list: Things that mean it.

- bus brakes
- winter
- the smell of pennies
- sweat behind the knees after running
- the moment a lie clears a face like a cloud leaving a window

He wanted sex every hour for three days straight and then not at all for a week. He thought about hormones like weather maps. He could forecast but not stop the rain. He didn't confuse rain for a plan. He wanted the kind that doesn't pretend. He kept finding the other kind. Motion as proof. He stopped mid-act again and apologized without a speech. He made tea. They said, "It's okay." It wasn't. It was kind.

School assembly. A man gave a talk about choices. "You can be whoever you want." He looked at the janitor sweeping behind him, the schedule taped to the broom closet, the chalk on the janitor's cuff. He thought: whoever is a rich word. He underlined it once and moved on.

He watched a video of a woman forgiving a killer in court. People in the comments called it grace. He felt a fracture in his chest, not from disagreement, from scale. Private grace televised is a kind of violence to the person who still needs anger to stay alive. He closed his laptop and stared at the ceiling. The fan didn't weigh in.

He read the word sincere. Looked up the origin. Without wax. He pictured cracked statues patched for sale. He thought about

people with warm wax cooling on their faces. He wanted to wipe it off and also leave them intact. That's the problem. You can't.

In class, debate day. "Is morality relative?" He wrote: relative like temperature—real, felt, local. Also: some fires burn everything regardless of your theory. He didn't raise his hand. He'd already had lunch in the silent room. That was enough relative for today.

A small scene fell on him without warning: bus again, same stop, different man. This one said to his hands, "I'm not bad," as if they'd accused him. No one answered. He wanted to say, you are what the next step made you and also what you refused to see. He said nothing. Counting holes again. Still eight. He liked constants.

He tried to plan a future. Adults asked. He pictured offices with carpet that ruins walking, screens that nudge you into shapes, words like alignment used to mean obedience. He felt sick and practical. He wrote: the rent will want me. He circled it.

He started a new page: Hallways We Build.

- school policies that love punctuality more than truth
- apologies timed to the damage of the apologizer
- posters that fix a problem on paper
- compliments that ask for smaller furniture

He added one hallway he would like:

- rooms where people say the thing and then stay to hold it while it shakes

He underlined that twice. Broke his rule. He broke it on purpose.

He stopped asking for friendship to be true. He started asking for it to be accurate. Less sugar, more salt. People left. The ones who stayed brought water. He kept them.

He saw a headline: "Teenage boy commits monstrous act." He thought: boy, then act, then monstrous. Words line up to protect the reader. He flipped the order in his head and it hurt right.

His mother said, "You look tired." He said, "I am." She said, "Try not to think so much." He said, "I'll try to be different than I am." She laughed like it was a joke and hugged him. The hug worked. Hugs beat theories.

He prayed again, out of habit now. Not for answers. For okay. The room said nothing. The nothing was clean. He took it.

He does not forgive easily. He also doesn't forget well enough to hate properly. He lives in between: memory with open hands.

He wrote another rule on the receipt under the desk: If a truth makes the room colder than the people can carry, add a blanket, not a lie.

He watched a teacher punish a boy for talking back. The boy

wasn't wrong. The timing was. He wrote: right thing, wrong choreography. Then he wondered if choreography is the whole thing. He hated that thought. He kept it.

He practiced a face that said "safe." It worked. People told him secrets they didn't want. He held them like hot plates. He didn't drop any. He put them down on paper later, without names, without wax.

He kept noticing the pencil line in his notebook. Single, quiet, straight. He liked that it didn't glow. He liked that it still cut.

Night again. Same hum. Same fan. Same neighbor cough plus a new sound: a fridge shudder before it calms down. He added it to the honest list.

He lay there and let the day not resolve. He didn't push for coherence. He wanted to. He let the wanting be the only lie in the room. He would fix that later or not. The floor stayed tilted. He slept like a man on a boat tied to a dock that keeps moving.

Tomorrow would be the same shape. He would carry both sides and not pick. He would count holes, underline once, wear a jacket. He would tell fewer truths out loud and more on paper. He would keep the fan for company.

The mask wasn't the problem. The mask is how skin survives certain weather. He wrote that sentence right before sleep and underlined it once with his eyes closed.

Morning will come like a machine that doesn't care and he

respects machines that don't lie. He will get up. The tilt will wait. He's used to it. He's good at walking funny.

SLOW ROT

Calibrated Descent

College didn't fix the tilt. It put carpet over it. Softer fall, same angle.

Orientation week smelled like citrus cleaner and new rules. People said authenticity while rehearsing it. They compared notes on favorite lies. "Be yourself," they said, and looked at each other to check the model.

Syllabi arrived heavy. Contracts in costume. Deadlines with smiling mouths. Words like participation, rigor, safe. He read them like maps of a building that doesn't admit its basement.

Seminar. The professor asked for "original takes on Foucault." Everyone said the same three sentences with different scarves. He said nothing and watched the clock pretend it wasn't bored.

He wrote an essay that answered the prompt by dismantling it. The professor circled "provocative" and gave him an A- for

tone. Another class he did the same and got "failure to meet criteria." He learned the shape: dissent, but calibrated. Fire, but in a tray.

Group projects trained him to choose between done and true. He chose true until the emails turned sharp. He delivered both at 3 a.m. because he couldn't sleep anyway. They thanked him with a thumbs-up emoji. He stared at the little hand. It meant nothing and it was honest.

A TA said, "Love your mind, but be careful." He asked, "Of what?" She said, "There are ways we talk here." He nodded. He could learn the chants. He didn't want to.

He kept two journals. One that could be found. Quotes, neat thoughts, names you're allowed to say aloud. The other hid under a mess that looked accidental but wasn't. He protected it with stupid passwords and logic puzzles no one would try to solve because no one wanted anything that badly. The second journal had teeth.

He watched his classmates discover themselves by committee. They wore words like merch. Neurodivergent. Poly. Monogamish. Queer. Ace. He wasn't mocking. He was counting how the labels stopped the bleeding and then turned into clothing.

Dorm kitchens at 2 a.m. had serious faces. People argued like they were building hospitals. "You're toxic." "That's emotional labor theft." Words made from useful bones, swung like furniture. The stove ticked. No one cooked.